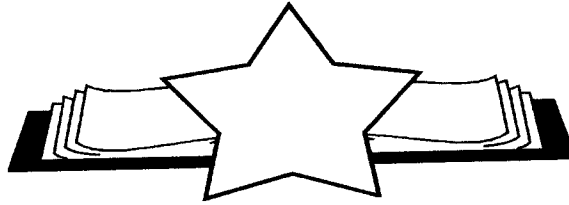


## NEW JERSEY

2000-2001

## Guidelines and Application

STAR



SCHOOLS

**Deadline for Application to County Office:  
NOVEMBER 27, 2000**

The Star School application is a public document. The information that you provide will serve as the official record. Review the application prior to submission to ensure accuracy and adherence to the guidelines. Type or keyboard information requested on this page

County	Warren
District (Proper Name)	Hackettstown School District
Address	315 Washington St. Street/P. O. Box Hackettstown, NJ City
Telephone	908-850-6500 Fax 908-850-6544 Email jcalabro@hackettstown.org
Chief School Administrator	Joanne Calabro
Nominated School (Proper Name)	Hackettstown Middle School
Address	500 Washington St. Street/P. O. Box Hackettstown, NJ City
Telephone	908-852-8554 Fax 908-850-6544 Email dsosmuns@fast.net
Principal	David. S. Osmun
Chief School Administrator's or Charter School Lead Person's Signature	<i>Joanne Calabro</i>

**FOR USE BY COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS ONLY**Approved: ☒ Yes ☐ No County Superintendent's Signature *[Signature]*

NEW JERSEY  
STAR SCHOOLS  
2000-2001 APPLICATION

RESPONSES to the information below and the statements must be ANONYMOUS. No reference should be made to the names of the district, the school or the community. Use the words "the school" in referring to the applicant in the responses to the statements.

The following data is required to assist the panelists in the evaluation of the application:

Type of School	Grade Levels	School Enrollment <u>410</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Elementary School	<input type="checkbox"/> <u>5-8</u>	Name of the School's Specialization or Whole-School Reform Model
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Middle School	<input type="checkbox"/>	<u>Interdisciplinary Teaming</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> Junior High School	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> High School	<input type="checkbox"/>	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	

**Location:**

☐ Urban/city; ☐ Suburban with urban characteristics; ☐ Suburban; ☒ Small City/Town; ☐ Rural

Previous Star School: Yes ☐ No ☒ If Yes, Year(s) \_\_\_\_\_

**KEYBOARDED RESPONSES** to the statements below must be no more than a total of five pages. Keyboard the statement followed by the response.

1. Describe the school's specialization or whole-school reform model and its objectives, the student educational needs and the specific *Core Curriculum Content Standards*, including the *Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards*,\* that it addresses. Detail how it promotes high student achievement and contributes to school-wide accomplishments.
2. Describe the professional development activities and research of the school's faculty. Detail to what extent these activities contribute to exemplary teaching practices in their classrooms. Explain the link between these activities and the specialization or whole-school reform model.
3. Describe the leadership style of the school's administration and how the management and educational program demonstrate administrative and fiscal efficiency. Describe any innovative scheduling and/or management strategies implemented.
4. Describe the school's overall approach to assessment. How are your methods aligned to the specialization or whole-school reform model? How are you ensuring that the content you are measuring is consistent with the *Core Curriculum Content Standards*? Provide student performance data for the school years 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 using state tests and, if you wish, national and/or district standardized norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, and/or alternative assessments. Explain any dramatic increase or decrease. Specify which groups, if any, are excluded from the assessments for which you provide data. Give the percentage of students excluded. You may use a chart.
5. Describe collaborative efforts with families, business, the community, school districts, and/or higher education that contribute to a school environment governed by the students' needs and promoting high student achievement.
6. **Previous Star School Winners Only:** Provide a one-page addendum to your application that describes efforts to expand or replicate the specialization or whole-school reform model within the school and/or the district. Have there been dissemination activities beyond the school or district? If so, please elaborate.

\*The May 1996 edition of the *Core Curriculum Content Standards* published by the New Jersey State Department of Education was disseminated to all districts and charter schools and is available on line through the department's website at <http://www.state.nj.us/education>.  
6appss.20

***1. Describe the school's specialization or whole-school model and its objectives, the student educational needs and the specific Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards that it addresses. Detail how it promotes high student achievement and contributes to school-wide accomplishments.***

The particular challenge of meeting the educational and social needs of the middle school student is well documented. Students in grades five through eight are at a crucial point in their development, growing and changing almost daily as they travel the path from childhood to young adulthood. Our school implemented the **interdisciplinary teaming** approach as a model of school management and teaching in order to more efficiently meet the vast and varied needs of our students during their middle school years. Through teaming, our professional staff of educators continues to more readily identify and address these needs and to foster the principles of knowledge, respect, diversity, cooperation, responsibility, and cooperation in our students. Additionally, teaming encourages administrators, counselors, teachers, and other staff members to work collaboratively, pooling their skills and knowledge to connect learning for students and to recognize the individual students and their unique qualities.

Our middle school consists of five teams. Each grade level team, grades five-eight, is comprised of at least one teacher in each academic discipline, and at least one special education teacher. These team teachers meet daily to plan interdisciplinary lessons and units, discuss the needs of their common students, conference with students to develop strategies for academic success or to praise their achievements, meet with parents, meet with administrators, counselors, the child study team, or the Pupil Assistance Committee. All of these daily meetings are designed to plan or review policies and procedures to better serve our students' needs and to communicate them to others on the team.

The special subject teachers also meet as a team. Communication with grade level teams is ensured through weekly team leader meetings with administration. This communication is key to addressing the needs of the whole child.

The most important members of the grade level teams are the students. On the first day of school, students attend a "team meeting" where this process is explained, and the staff members are introduced, so that they understand that we intend to work together for their success.

Each grade level team has established a mission statement of goals and guiding principles, which is published in a pamphlet for students and parents and posted in classrooms and the guidance office.

No student "falls through the cracks" in our school's teaming model, and therefore, we ensure high achievement for our children. Each student knows that she/he is part of a team. The student knows that her/his teachers meet daily to discuss, plan, evaluate, and revise programs to meet her/his needs. Each student knows that she/he may attend a team meeting if desired to strategize for success. Students are frequently invited to attend meetings for this purpose.

The team acts as a 'mini-guidance department' to identify and deal with students' social and academic concerns. As the grade level team identifies and brainstorms strategies, it enlists other staff members (i.e. nurse, guidance, Child Study Team) as needed, to adjust student schedules for academic placement, investigate health concerns, or offer counseling. As a team, all of us who are involved in the child's education, including the child, have better means of communication and opportunities to efficiently meet the child's needs. Academic scores and social harmony measure achievement as our school works together on various projects and documents significantly fewer disciplinary referrals each year.

As all aspects of the students' education are affected by teaming, many of the Core Curriculum Content Standards are met. In particular, teaming addresses Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards 1-5. The collaborative teaming method models for students' workplace readiness skills, fosters the use of technology to demonstrate those skills, and teaches critical thinking, problem solving, and self-management through cooperation, conferencing and interdisciplinary studies.

Cross-curricular teaching allows for standards to be addressed in several subject areas. For example, as our seventh graders meet Social Studies Standard 6.1 and learn about citizenship and the U. S. Constitution, they are also meeting Language Arts Standard 3.4 as they read a novel entitled Nothing But the Truth about a challenge to a teen's individual rights. Examples of concurrent, interdisciplinary meeting of Core Curriculum Standards abound in our middle school teaming model.

***2. Describe the professional development activities and research of the school's faculty. Detail to what extent these activities contribute to exemplary teaching practices in their classrooms. Explain the link between these activities and the specialization or whole-school reform model.***

Adopting the teaming model in 1994-1995 was only the beginning of an on-going process of staff development and refinement of the model. Our school offered staff course workshops for interdisciplinary learning, cooperative learning, and the formation of Pupil Assistance Committees as precursors of this policy change. Representatives from guidance, administration, and the teaching staff were provided opportunities to visit various middle schools in our state that had previously adopted teaming to observe their models and interview their staff. Faculty meetings were forums for discussion of the various models for teaming, and representatives from our staff fielded questions and took staff suggestions as our administrators and counselors investigated the scheduling of staff and students to fit the model. Volunteers from each grade and the special subject teachers were chosen as team leaders for additional training in the teaming model.

Texts were also provided for team leaders and their members; specifically, The Team Process, A Handbook for Teachers by Elliot Y. Merenbloom (c. 1991) and Implementing and Improving Teaming, A Handbook for Middle Level Leaders by Jerry Rottier (c. 1996) as well as the initiative Turning Points, a report on middle-grades education, as a reform framework, funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York (c. 1990). Each text offers specific and practical information, as well as extensive resource lists.

Staff development courses continue to be offered which encourage teachers to work collaboratively across disciplines and to view each child as an individual. A recent course by our curriculum supervisor on Multiculturalism in the Classroom provided a wealth of information and offered many specific examples of how to design lessons across disciplines to address the increasingly diverse population of our school.

Teacher workshop days, usually offered twice per academic year, have also been dedicated to teaming research. Team teachers are guided by administrators to use the time for staff team-building activities, which include revision of mission statements, team principles, and goals, and to research and develop the curriculum maps and interdisciplinary units that are basic to our program. As the make-up of our staff changes and current staff members continue their graduate work, more information and varied experiences encourage us to revise components of our model to better meet student needs. Teachers are afforded opportunities for out of district workshops, as well.

Since teaming encourages teachers to "open their doors" and conduct daily dialogues regarding teaching methods and student achievement, professional development is on going. Colleagues with various experiences collaborate and cooperate daily, modeling for students the teaming strategies that foster success.

***3. Describe the leadership style of the school's administration and how the management and educational program demonstrate administrative and fiscal efficiency. Describe any innovative scheduling and/or management strategies implemented.***

Our school exemplifies teaming in spirit and practice, especially in the leadership style of its administration. Our principal conducts weekly team leader meetings before school with those leaders of the four grade level teams, the encore (special subject) team, and a guidance counselor to establish

policies and procedures. These weekly meetings are also a forum for scheduling special events, conferences, standardized testing, assemblies, and meetings, offering each team leader input, depending of the impact on her/his team. As a group, we have been given a great deal of authority to initiate change in our school, compromising as we better understand the needs of each other's team through weekly communication.

Team leaders report back to their team teachers in the daily meetings, acting as liaisons to the leader group each week. Therefore, each team member is represented and heard when school-wide decisions are made.

The principal may attend daily team meetings whenever the team or he deems it necessary, but he regularly schedules a monthly visit for direct communication with this small group, in addition, of course, to monthly faculty meetings.

Guidance counselors also meet with each team, as needed, but regularly schedule a weekly meeting to keep track of those students with specific academic or social concerns. At these times, they offer strategies, which may include their own conferencing with the child or parent, their attendance at a teacher conference with the child or parent, change in a child's placement, or referral to the Child Study Team. C.S.T. members frequently use daily team meetings as a means of communicating changes in a student's I.E.P., background information, or strategies team teachers might try to better meet the student's needs. This is a most efficient way to communicate these important issues to all of the teachers in contact with these children.

Team teachers have some flexibility in scheduling to allow for team assemblies, guest speakers, or special interdisciplinary activities without disrupting the entire school's schedule.

In addition, a weekly Academic Assistance period is built into the schedule. Music students may then attend rehearsal, and all students have this opportunity to meet with any of their subject teachers for extra help, computer use, or library research. This period is the same for all grade levels, and it allows cross-grade activities, as well.

Perhaps most importantly, teaming has made it much easier to adjust a student's daily academic schedule so that she/he can be placed in the most appropriate, least restrictive academic setting. By scheduling in-class support teachers, classroom aides, E.S.L. aides, and resource room teachers by grade level team, guidance has more flexibility for student scheduling.

One of the great benefits of this scheduling is the opportunity for team-teaching between special education and regular education teachers. All students benefit from the variety of teaching strategies which address their individual needs.

Teaming has not placed any financial burden on our school. In fact, because the team has absorbed some of the administrative, guidance, and disciplinary roles, it is a most efficient way to manage a school.

***4. Describe the school's overall approach to assessment. How are your methods aligned to the specialization or whole-school reform model? How are you ensuring that the content you are measuring is consistent with the Core Curriculum Content Standards? Provide student performance data for the school years 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 using state tests and, if you wish, national and/or alternative assessments. Explain any dramatic increase or decrease. Specify which groups, if any, are excluded from the assessments for which you provide data. Give the percentage of students excluded. You may use a chart.***

Our middle school uses various assessment tools to monitor the success of our program. As curriculum is assessed and written each year, the State Core Curriculum Content Standards are met. Copies of our curriculum designate this alignment for each standard with correlating activities for each.

In the past three years alone, our school has been awarded five "Best Practice" citations, all of which directly relate to teaming. In the 1997-98 school year our school was recognized in the area of public engagement for the program "If Walls Could Talk?" in grade eight.

In the 1998-99 school year our school was recognized for "A Middle Ages Trade Fair" in the area of social studies. Sixth graders study this historic time period in all of their classes and create the historically accurate costumes, foods, music, booths, and games of a trade fair. Their family members are invited to this celebration of learning.

Also that year, our fifth grade was recognized for the "I Ate An Invertebrate." Although primarily a science unit, this study of invertebrates includes creative writing, art, and cooking as students, parents, and teachers work toward their seafood luncheon.

In 1999-2000 a Best Practice was awarded for professional development. Our school's "PLATO" project (Planning Alternative To Observation) was developed by our principal and guidance counselor as a way to foster teachers' professional growth. The program encourages teachers to undertake research projects, develop curriculum, or initiate a new teaching method and document the process as an alternative for classroom observation evaluation. Clearly, "PLATO" offers teachers the opportunity to collaborate in this project, as well.

Our fifth grade was again recognized for another of their interdisciplinary units called "Rockin' Regions" in the area of social studies. This geography-based unit includes language arts, science, math, art, cooking, and music as students learn about areas of the United States.

This year we have submitted three programs for "Best Practice" recognition. Our seventh grade has developed a social studies unit "Our Country - The Beginning," while our sixth grade expounded upon a Bilingual Education and Diversity program entitled "Our Heritage," as well as a Language Arts Literacy component called "Reading for Life."

Each of the grade level Best Practices aligns with many of the Core Curriculum Content standards and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards. These are examples of the many such interdisciplinary units presented in our school.

Each year our school determines specific objectives to test for improvement. In September of 1998, our fifth and sixth grade students were administered a pre-test in computer-aided writing. In June of 1999, those same students demonstrated a 20% average increase. That same year, our seventh and eighth grade students were given a math computation test in September and the following June. Our students demonstrated a 27% average increase score on that test.

Our students take the state GEPA test in March. In 1999, our regular education students earned 87.5% passing in language arts/literacy and 91.7% passing in math. In March of 2000, our regular education students earned 92.1% passing in language arts/literacy, 80.3% in math, and 93.4% in science. These scores are very favorable considering we have a District Factor Grouping (DFG) designation of DE. In 1999 we had only two students that received exemptions from the state tests, one for special education, and one for E.S.L. In 2000 there were four E.S.L. students exempted.

Most significantly, however, is how teaming has impacted on our school's environment and atmosphere. In the 1998-1999 school year, we tracked the number of reported conflicts between fifth graders. Tracking that same group in 1999-2000 as sixth graders, there was a 21.4% reduction in reported conflicts. That can be directly correlated to the year of teaming that group experienced, and the model of cooperation and conferencing.

Statistics kept by our school's disciplinarian also bear this out. Since the introduction of teaming in our school in 1994-1995, there has been a steady decline in student referrals to the office and suspensions. There has also been a general decline in the number of detentions as well.

We conclude that students learn and behave better as a result of teaming. Feeling better connected to the process, students achieve more.

***5. Describe collaborative efforts with families, business, the community, school districts, and/or higher education that contribute to a school environment governed by the students' needs and promoting high student achievement.***

Teaming has made our school a true community and has afforded us more opportunities for outreach in our town. Opportunities such as these make learning relevant and life-long for students.

Each grade level team does several truly cross-curricular units of study that invite community participation. Our fifth grade's study of invertebrates and regions, both awarded "Best Practice" citations, are two examples of such units.

The "If Walls Could Talk?" which was awarded "Best Practice" recognition in the area of public engagement, involves students going among our historic community, researching, and speaking with citizens and local historians as they learn practical uses of their academic studies.

Our sixth grade's "Medieval Trade Fair", also recognized as a "Best Practice," depends on community involvement. The sixth grade also does an extensive study of students' heritage, a cross-curricular study that includes the involvement of extended family members in a "Heritage Day" celebration of food, music, maps, and pictures.

In seventh grade, our studies of the American Revolution and Civil War include classroom visits from a local historian who is a re-enactor. His sharing of artifacts, anecdotes and apparel greatly enhances our studies and gives students a better appreciation for our community's historic involvement in these wars. The town's recent Civil War encampment invited our seventh and eighth graders to participate in the walking tour and demonstrations.

Eighth graders studying the Holocaust also invite community spokespersons and WWII veterans to address classes with first hand accounts. An overnight trip to Washington, DC takes our students into the greater community to learn more about the importance of their citizenship.

Our school has embarked on community projects, which encourage all of our students' participation. The development of team missions, which connect to our school's mission, is an important link. In the spirit of those principles, we conduct annual food and toy drives, as well as a clothing drive. The clothing drive is related to a classroom activity as each language arts student chooses an article of donated clothing as the basis for a creative writing project.

Our teacher of gifted and talented has been recognized in 1998-99 and 1999-00 by our county's Human Relations Commission for work done with our students "promoting the dignity of humankind" and for their Kosovo Relief Efforts.

As our school celebrated its 125<sup>th</sup> anniversary last year, the entire school participated in a series of celebrations and personal challenges, most of which were charitable community service projects or "acts of kindness." As promised, when each teacher and student had completed his/her 125 challenge, our principal went onto the roof of our building in a fire truck 'cherry picker' to the delight of the students, neighbors, and local newspaper.

Retired teachers from a local retirement community volunteer as after-school tutors for our students. Our local police officers are in our school for the DARE program, we conduct walking field trips to our local college for performances and displays, and we welcome our high school students to our school to teach our students about ways to resist drugs.

There are many on-going programs to connect our school with our community and to promote high student achievement.